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Collaborative Tagging and Folksonomies : User Driven Knowledge Sharing

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Introduction

The amount of knowledge a member of an organization has to handle is enormous. The person is challenged in coping with the large amount of information the job requires. Organizations use many resources in making information available to its employees through the structure in the information architecture.

1. Too much information too little resources

At the same time a new type of information system called folksonomies is emerging. Folksonomies give their users the opportunity to index and to share their documents and knowledge through collaborative tagging . A folksonomy is in its nature an uncontrolled information system.

2. Folksonomies are user driven but lack control

This poster proposes that the controlled traditional information system and the folksonomy should collaborate rather than counteract one another.

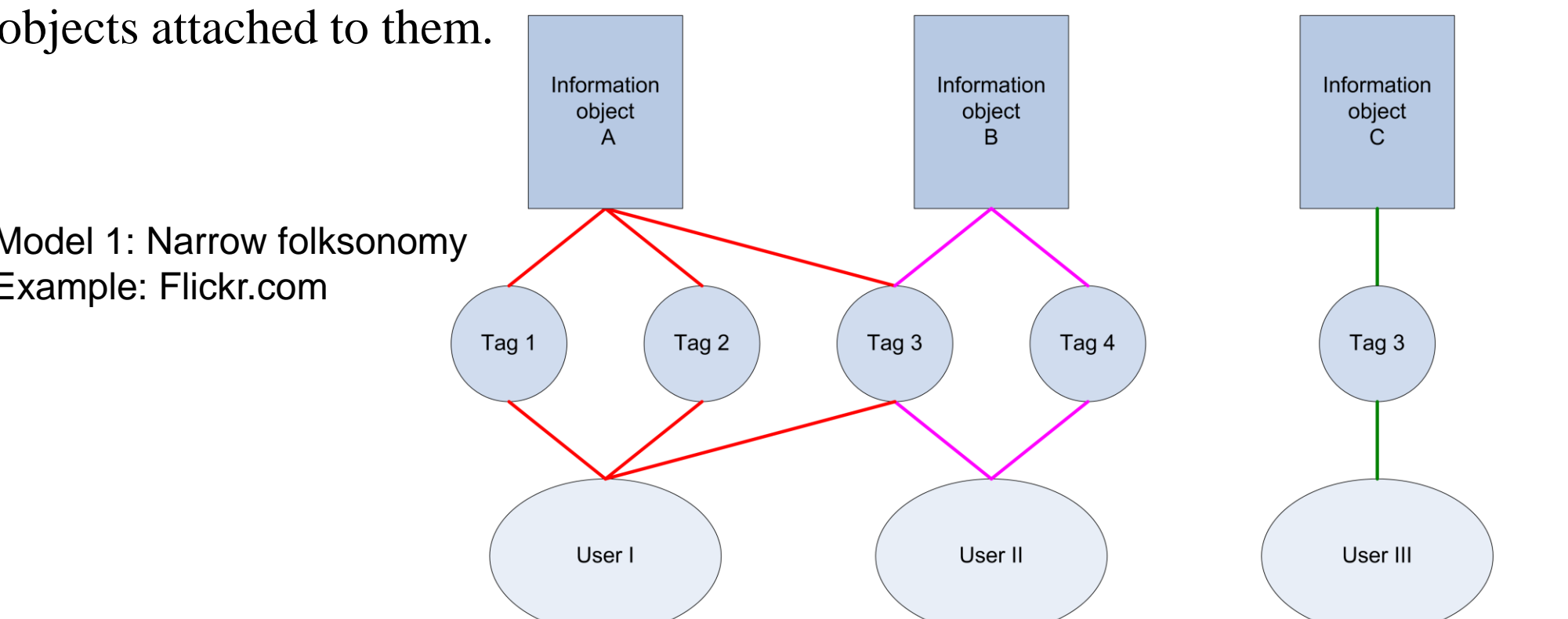
Typology of folksonomies

The definition of a folksonomy is a collection of uncontrolled user generated keywords called tags.

This is a very wide definition therefore there needs to be a more detailed typology to qualify the discussion of folksonomies and collaborative tagging. Basically there are two types of folksonomies, Broad and Narrow [1].

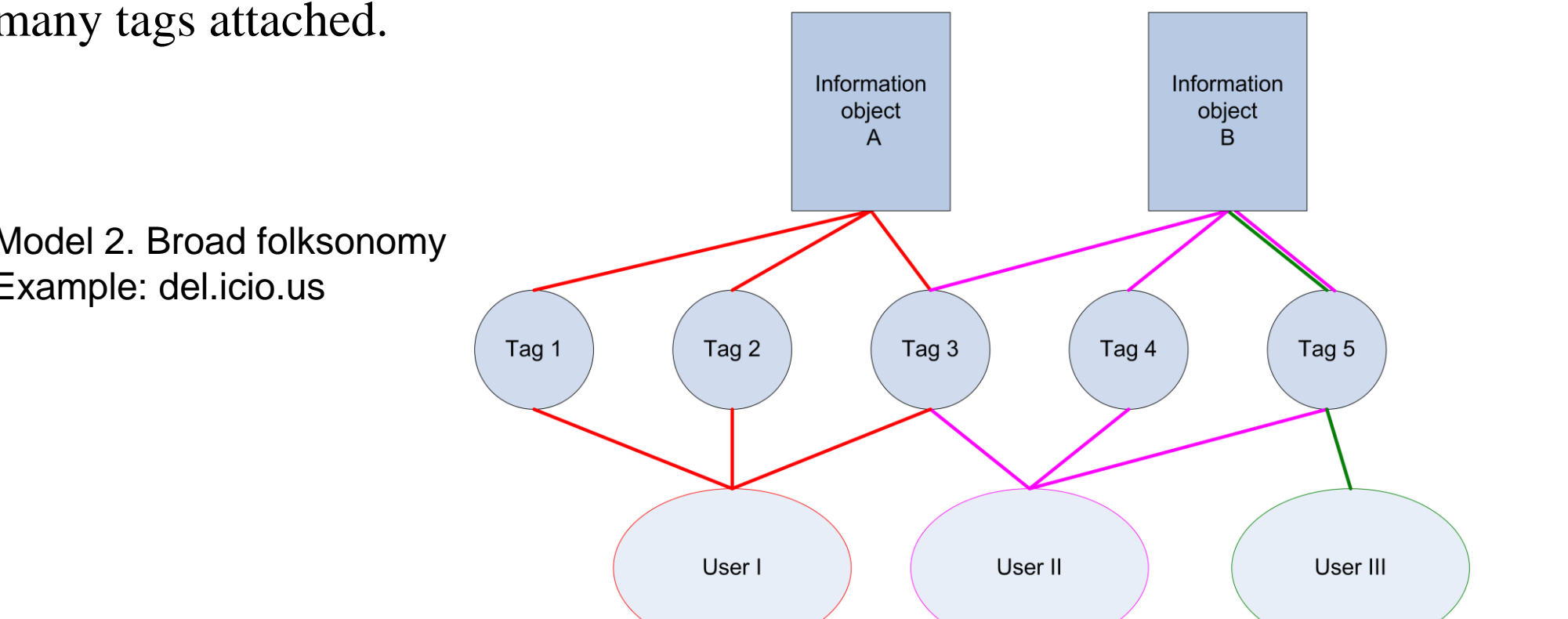
Narrow folksonomies

In this type of folksonomy the users tag information objects which they often authored themselves. Thereby each information object will have relatively few tags, but every tag can have many information objects attached to them.



Broad folksonomies

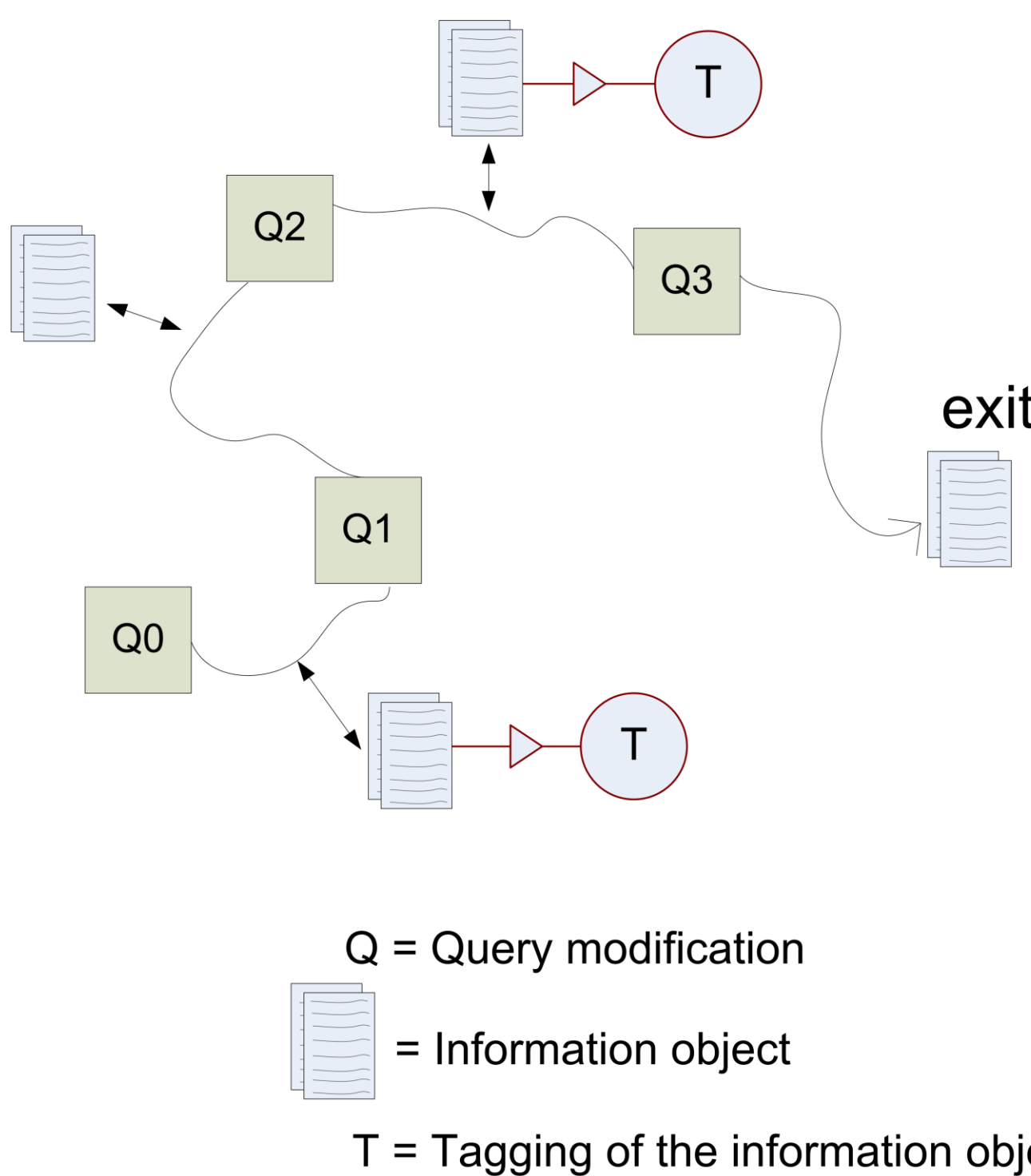
In this type of folksonomy the users tag information objects which they do not own. This entails that some information objects have many tags attached.



Use

Traditionally, indexing to an information system and information retrieval within the system are two separate processes with separate research communities, tools and methods. In a folksonomy the users can index information objects the minute they find the object interesting. The indexing of information objects are incorporated in the information seeking.

Model 3: Berry picking and indexing, inspired by Bates' Berry picking [2]



The integration of indexing and information seeking is not the only factor that makes information seeking in a folksonomy special. Folksonomies open up for browsing via: information objects, tags and users, this results in a much more exploratory way of information seeking called pivot browsing.

Research in the field

Although folksonomies and collaborative tagging are fairly new tools for organization knowledge there are some research results in the field. The following are a few of the essentials:

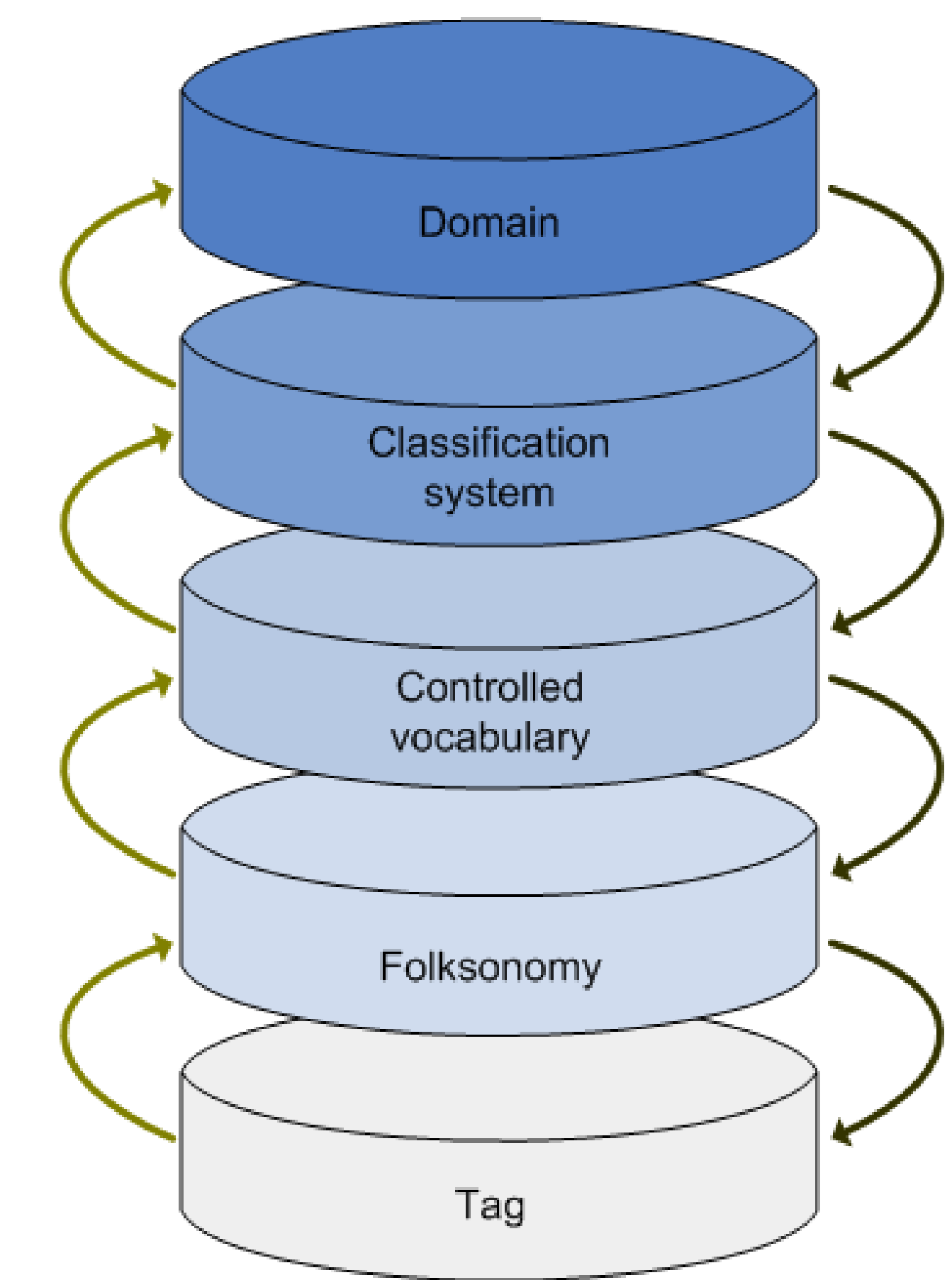
- Kipp and Campbell [3] have analyzed a collection of popular tags harvested from del.icio.us. The results show that synonyms, acronyms and alternative ways of spelling often occur in tags relating to the same information object.
- Steve.museum is a project that investigates the possible use of collaborative tagging in indexing museum objects [4]. There are no results published yet other than a proof of concept study. In this non-professionals should add tags to selected objects. The relevance of the tags was later judged by museum professionals and they found that 77 % of the tags were relevant.
- Spiteri and McInnis have made a survey of the possible use of tags in an OPAC [5]. The survey compare popular tags in del.icio.us, Furl and Technocrati with LCSH to find precise, partial- or no match between them. 59 % of the tags used were a controlled term in LCSH. Most of the terms which were not a LCSH were products nemes, adjectives and IT-related terms. Furthermore the survey showed that LCSH was more formal in its terms.

- IBM have launched an experimental platform for social bookmarking called Dogear [6]. Even though the full documentation of the use of the tool is not ready, the preliminary results show that the users index information objects with an average of 2,3 tags pr. object, and 24% of all indexed information objects are from the corporate intranet. The social bookmarking tool is well received in the organization.

IA and folksonomies

Recent research indicates that the tags applied in the folksonomies have potential in a more controlled information environment. The following model shows a folksonomy that's implemented in an organizations information architecture.

Model 4: An organizations information architecture with collaborative tagging



The model can be read as followed

The folksonomy consist of user generated tags. Terms with weighted importance could be extracted from the folksonomy and added to the controlled vocabulary. This extraction could be manual, semi- or fully automated. The classification system is more slow in adding new concepts and terms. The domain with which the organization interacts is the top level of the model.

A classification system is influenced by the domain it operates within. The information professionals who construct, handle and maintain the controlled vocabulary are influenced by the classification system. The users who generate the tags, also use the controlled vocabulary and the classification system.

Questions for you

This poses a series of questions.

- How can collaborative tagging and folksonomies be implemented in an organization?
- To what extent can folkosnomies and collaborative tagging enrich the formal information architecture in an organization?
- Can user generated tags be considered equal with a controlled term as a document representation?
- How can the information professional support and encourage user driven knowledge sharing via folksonomies?

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For further information

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